



## Inspecting Fruits and Vegetables is No Small Potatoes

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**Editor's Note:** This is part of a series of feature stories highlighting DATCP programs and the people who work with them.

MADISON – Tim Leege was given a chance to leave Wisconsin, but family ties were too strong to break.

Leege had graduated from UW-Stevens Point with a degree in biology and took his first job as a chemist for National Cash Register. In his second year on the job, a recently-married Leege was asked to relocate to another state. Rather than move his family out of Wisconsin, he took a state employment test and landed a position with the Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection (DATCP) inspecting fruits and vegetables at a shipping point in Plover.

That was August 1974. Richard Nixon was still president.

“It will be 40 years next August. All I can say about the 40 years is that it went by really quickly,” said Leege, who is now a Fruit and Vegetable Program Manager.

Leege doesn't have time to think about the past – the present is busy enough. The state's potato harvest ended in mid-October and cranberries were harvested in early November. His team has been hard at work inspecting goods at processors statewide to ensure that they meet the standards at which they are to be sold.

Leege manages and trains seven full-time staff members and up to 40 part-time inspectors. The focus of his job is geared toward food safety on the farm and ensuring that consumers are getting the quality of goods that they are paying for. His crew provides inspections at large farms that serve as shipping points for goods that appear on the shelves at major national retailers and Canadian stores. DATCP has a full-time crew at the McCain factory in Plover, providing inspections for the largest French fry producer in North America. During the cranberry harvest, DATCP holds a contract with Ocean Spray to inspect berries at seven different fresh packers.

Inspecting these goods is no small potatoes. In 2012, Wisconsin was the top producer of cranberries in the country, growing 4,830,000 barrels of product. These cranberries have a total value of more than \$230 million and represent 60% of the nation's total haul. Wisconsin was the third leading producer of potatoes in the country in 2012, growing nearly three billion pounds of potatoes worth more than \$256 million.

Leege is proud of the services that his team provides in ensuring that the products Wisconsin consumers buy are, in fact, the grade at which they are advertised.

“Our services protect consumers from misbranded products. For example, the grade of a potato is marked on the package. If a broker is selling potatoes as USA #1 grade, size A, our inspection determines if that is an appropriate designation,” said Leege.

After four decades of visiting farms and following trends in the industry, Leege finds the advancements in farm technology to be the most notable change over time.

“The one thing that intrigues me in my 40 years in this business is seeing a farm that I worked at in the 70's and seeing that same farm today,” said Leege. “The changes in the technology



*Tim Leege, DATCP Fruit and Vegetable Program Manager*

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and equipment used to harvest the crops are amazing. Technology has really changed farming!”

While chemistry may have been his first professional interest, Leege has no regrets about that fateful decision he made years ago to keep his family in Wisconsin and to work in the agricultural world. Having grown up on a Wisconsin beef farm, Leege has enjoyed staying close to his farm roots and making a career out of ensuring the quality of Wisconsin products. His enduring role at DATCP is a fit that he can’t deny.

“I’m a farm boy, definitely,” noted Leege. “You can take the boy off the farm, but you can’t take farming out of the boy.”

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